

# The Wolcotts of Windsor, (Conn)

by Donald Bergquist

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In conjunction with our nation's Bicentennial, Dr. Christopher Collier, Professor of History at the University of Bridgeport, published a monograph entitled "Connecticut in the Continental Congress." The opening paragraph of Professor Collier's monograph provides a vivid description of Connecticut families during the pre-Revolutionary period.

"Connecticuters were always a quarrelsome people, arguing, contending, disputing and litigating. But their quarrels were those of friends and relations, really all in the family. As bitter as they might seem at times, they lived together and worked together on the small piece of land that was Connecticut, and their fundamental instincts were collective and co-operative, not individualistic and selfish. To call their squabbling family quarrels is almost a literal truth. For colonial Connecticut was run by a collection of families so tied together by blood and marriage that any disagreement at all inevitably found family members on both sides of every question. The tribal nature of Connecticut leadership is magnificently demonstrated in the person of Ursula Wolcott who married her cousin, Matthew Griswold, and thus became the daughter, sister, wife and mother of Connecticut governors, as well as cousin of four more of them."

Professor Collier is certainly correct as far as he goes, but he neglects to mention that Ursula Wolcott Griswold was also the aunt of a Connecticut governor (her nephew was Oliver Wolcott Jr.).

Ursula Wolcott is an excellent example of the intricate intertwining of early Connecticut families. Her great-grandfather was Henry Wolcott who came to America in 1630 and fathered a family that established a unique record of political service that has never been equalled in American history: three successive generations...father, son and grandson...serving as governor of Connecticut.

Henry Wolcott, the "founding father" of the Wolcott family in America was an unusual emigrant; he was not an

obscure adventurer with nothing to lose and everything to gain. In fact, his position in England was good. Had England in the early 17th Century not been a place of tumultuous social, political, religious and economic change, Henry Wolcott might well have lived his entire life in the Somerset County village of Tolland where he was born in 1578.

While the Wolcotts lived in Tolland and worshipped in the little Church of St. John the Baptist, records show that young Henry Wolcott was baptized in the adjoining parish of Lydiard St. Lawrence, the second son of "John Wolcott". It appears that the Wolcott family had lived in Tolland for about 100 years prior to Henry's birth. A footnote in Hollister's "History of Connecticut" (Vol. I, Page 189) traces the family back to the eleventh century in Wales.

On 19 January 1606, Henry Wolcott married Elizabeth Saunders, daughter of Thomas Saunders of Lydiard St. Lawrence. In the succeeding twenty years, five sons and two daughters were born of this marriage. Simultaneously, James I reigned as the first Stuart king while England was rapidly changing; and a small ship called the "Mayflower" was bringing a group of Englishmen to Plymouth where they would establish the first permanent settlement in America. By this time, the Wolcott family was living comfortably at Gauldon Manor, the principal estate in the farming community of Tolland. A reasonably prosperous man nearing fifty years of age, Henry Wolcott must have been tempted to remain in England. But his overwhelming concern for the future of his children led him to make an exploratory trip to America in 1628. He liked what he saw and returned to his family in England, determined to bring the family to America. The two girls, the youngest son, Simon, and their oldest brother, John, were to remain in England for perhaps another ten years in order that they might receive an education which would not be available to them in America.

Under the inspiration of the Reverend John White, Vicar of Dorchester, England, one hundred and forty persons from the western counties of Devon, Somerset and Dorset congregated at Plymouth, England in March 1630 to embark for America on the ship, "Mary and John". Few of the passengers were personally known to one another before their voyage but they formed a Congregational Society which stands today in Windsor as the oldest Congregational Society in America. Historian Charles Edward Banks states that "It may be assumed that these people, from many parishes scattered over three counties, were moved by the same urge to emigrate which animated those of the Winthrop Fleet, but it is safe to say that the tales of 'religious persecution' of these people was not a factor in their pilgrimage. The West Country was free from it."

Under the spiritual leadership of Reverend John Maverick and the younger Reverend John Warham, the passengers of the "Mary and John" arrived at Nantasket (Hull), Mass.

on May 30, and later at Dorchester, Mass. After several years, it became apparent that the recently-discovered Connecticut River Valley offered more fertile land than coastal Dorchester; and virtually the entire so-called Dorchester Company, including the Wolcotts, moved to what we now know as Windsor. Perhaps the story of Rev. John Warham exemplifies how well the land around Windsor provided the necessary food for the first settlers. Having led his followers through the wilderness to Windsor (Rev. Maverick remained behind in Mass.), Rev. Warham built a corn mill on the bank of the Farmington River (now the corner of Poquonock Avenue and East Street) where he ground corn raised by members of his congregation. It is said that Rev. Warham fed his flock spiritually on Sundays and materially during the week. He continued to serve his congregation until his death in 1670; and the State has now placed an historic marker at the site of the Warham Corn Mill.

Back to Henry Wolcott: Having served as a member of the First General Court in Massachusetts in 1630, Mr. Henry Wolcott (a complimentary prefix bestowed upon him by his contemporaries) was elected one of twelve members of Connecticut's First General Assembly in 1637. After six years of service in the Lower House, in 1643 he was elected one of six or eight members of the House of Magistrates (as the Upper House of present Senate was then called) and subsequently elected each year until his death in 1655.

Henry Wolcott was buried behind the church in which he worshipped, scarcely a mile from the site of his former home, south of the Palisado and near the Connecticut River. Five weeks after the death of her husband, Elizabeth Saunders Wolcott died and was buried beside her husband; the monument over their grave is easily found and the inscriptions are easily read, nearly three and a quarter centuries after their deaths.

One may only wonder how much the heritage of Henry Wolcott's service in the early days of the Massachusetts and Connecticut Colonies provided inspiration to the dozens of his descendants who have subsequently served their nation in high governmental positions.

Of seven children, six came to America; John, the eldest son, remained in England and is believed to have died without issue. Another son, Christopher, never married and died in 1662. Thus, all descendants of Henry Wolcott trace their lineage through the sons, Henry, George or Simon; or through the two daughters, Anna or Mary.

The second son, Henry Wolcott, was 31 years old when he married Sarah Newberry in 1641. (Note that Sarah Newberry's mother, Joan or Joanne Dabinott Newberry, was the second wife of Rev. John Warham). Henry Wolcott was one of 19 gentlemen named in the Charter of Connecticut; elected to the House of Deputies in 1660; and then to the House of Magistrates until his death in 1680. In the Wolcott tradition, several of his children were engaged in public

service during their lives.

George, the third son, married Elizabeth Treat in about 1649. This line moved to Wethersfield where the marriage bore two sons and two daughters.

Turning to the daughters, Anna, born about 1620, remained in England during her parents' early years in America. Presumably, she came to America in the late 1630s. At about the same time, the Church at Windsor was seeking an associate for Reverend Warham, and found him in England in the person of the Reverend Ephraim Huit. Reverend Huit was accompanied to America in 1639 by two young men, brothers Edward and Matthew Griswold. Seven years later (in 1646), Matthew Griswold married Ann Wolcott and thereby started a line which Stiles describes in "The History of Ancient Windsor" as one which "abounds in governors, judges, and 'men of high degree' to an extent unparalleled by any other American family." Anna Wolcott's husband, Matthew Griswold of Saybrook (later Lyme), was himself a man of prominence and wealth, serving several terms as Deputy in Connecticut's General Court. At the beginning of this talk, we spoke of Ursula Wolcott whose husband, Matthew Griswold, and son, Roger Griswold, both served as Governors of Connecticut...both direct descendants of Anna and Matthew through their eldest son, Matthew. Additionally, a daughter of Anna and Matthew Griswold, Anna, married Abraham Bronson and were direct ancestors of Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Morrison Waite. And today, a descendant of Anna and Matthew Griswold, George Williams, serves loyally as Secretary to this organization. Another Griswold descendant: Alexander Graham Bell.

The other daughter, Mary, was born about 1622 and married Job Drake in 1646. Suffice to say that Mary and Job Drake counted among their many grandchildren, Sarah Drake, who married Roger Wolcott, Colonial governor and father of Gov. Oliver Wolcott, signer of the Declaration of Independence.

We've talked of all but Simon...only five when his parents left him in England and embarked for America. When 32, he married Joanna Cook, a marriage that lasted only until her death a month later. Simon remained single for four more years. Then in 1661, Martha Pitkin, a young lady of reported charm and beauty, came to Connecticut unescorted, seeking to persuade her brother William, recently appointed King's Attorney for the Colony of Connecticut, to return with her to London, "not once supposing that he intended remaining in the wilderness," as she said. She arrived to find her brother feeding his pigs, and the remark she made then has come down in history: "I left one brother in England serving his king, and found another in America serving his swine." Certainly this independent young woman had no intention of remaining in the "wilderness".

That Martha's plans did change was due in part to the elders of the colony. So great was their admiration for

*See if my this world* (B)

her talents and brilliance that they formed a conspiracy to induce her to remain. "This stock is too valuable to be parted with," they agreed. It became "a matter of general consultation what young man was good enough to be presented to Miss Pitkin". They all concluded that tall, serious-minded Simon Wolcott was the very one who might interest her. And they were right. Martha's brother encouraged the courtship; suddenly London, with its soft fogs, its moderate climate, its many intellectual and cultural advantages, lost its charm and attraction for her. Martha and Simon were married that same year.

This marriage lasted just over 25 years, until Simon's death in 1687. During their married life, Simon and Martha Wolcott settled in Simsbury, saw their home destroyed and all of their possessions lost during King Phillip's War; and returned to Windsor where he owned 200 acres across the Connecticut River (now South Windsor), considered to have the richest estate on the town list. Six of their children grew to adulthood and married. Each of three daughters married into prominent Connecticut and Western Massachusetts families: Elizabeth married Daniel Cooley; Martha married Thomas Allyn Jr.; and Joanna married John Colton. Each of the sons took a wife with a prominent area name: Simon (son of Simon and Martha) married Sarah Chester; Henry first married Jane Allyn who was a granddaughter of Rev. John Warham and later married Hannah Wolcott, the widow of his cousin, John Wolcott. And Roger, the youngest son, married his cousin, Sarah Drake, as we mentioned earlier.

Young Roger was only eight years old when his father, Simon, died. He learned to read and write only after his father's death - presumably influenced substantially by his mother, Martha Pitkin Wolcott, daughter of William Pitkin, a distinguished English educator with two degrees from Pembroke College, Oxford. Whatever education young Roger Wolcott received in rugged Connecticut in the 1690s served him well for he was a selectman by 1707 and representative in the General Assembly two years later. Over the first half of the Eighteenth Century, Roger Wolcott served Connecticut in a variety of legislative and judicial capacities. Then, in 1750, at the age of seventy-one, he was elevated to the governor's chair serving until 1754. Even then, more than a decade of life was ahead of him as he died at the age of 88 in 1767.

We will not attempt to enumerate all of Roger's children but merely highlight a few:

1. Roger (1704-1759). A representative from Windsor in the General Assembly, Judge in the Superior Court and one of the revisers of the laws of the state.
2. Alexander (1712-1795), M.D. Surgeon (graduate of Yale College), Justice of Peace and representative of Windsor in the General Assembly.
3. Erastus (1722-1793). Representative from South

Windsor in the General Assembly, Speaker of the Lower House, Judge and Brigadier General of the Connecticut Militia in the Revolutionary War. His wife was his cousin, Jerusha Wolcott, daughter of John Wolcott of South Windsor.

4. Ursula (1724-1788) became the wife of her cousin, Governor Matthew Griswold and as we've noted, was mother, aunt, sister, etc. of other Connecticut governors.
5. Oliver (1726-1797), youngest son of Roger and perhaps the Wolcott whom we know best today. Consider that Oliver was born 148 years after his great-grandfather, Henry Wolcott - an average of nearly fifty years between generations.

At first it seemed as though Oliver Wolcott might not follow in the foot steps of his many forbears as he began to study medicine under the direction of his brother, Dr. Alexander Wolcott, following his graduation from Yale College. But the allure of the law and politics proved too powerful. By 1751, Oliver Wolcott had been appointed first sheriff of the newly-organized county of Litchfield, the remote north-west corner of Connecticut. He was also the first representative of the new town of Litchfield in the General Assembly. As the clouds of revolution gathered around the colonies, Oliver Wolcott had grown to be a respected pillar of the American cause. By 1776 he had been chosen as one of Connecticut's four delegates to the Continental Congress and was among the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence. We quote from a biography published in 1848 entitled "Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence" by Rev. Charles Goodrich:

"Immediately after the adoption of that instrument, he returned to Connecticut, and was now invested with the command of fourteen regiments of the state militia, which were raised for the defense of New York. In November, he resumed his seat in Congress, and on the adjournment of that body to Baltimore, he accompanied them, and there spent the winter of 1777. In the ensuing summer, he was engaged in several military movements; after which, he joined the northern army, under General Gates, with a corps of several hundred volunteers, and assisted in the memorable defeat of the British army under General Burgoyne. From this period, until 1786, he was either in attendance upon congress, in the field in defense of his country, or, as a commissioner of Indian affairs for the northern department, he was assisting in settling the terms of peace with the six nations. In 1786 he was elected lieutenant governor, an office to which he was annually elected for ten years, when he was raised to the chief magistracy of the state. This latter office, however, he enjoyed but a little time, death putting an end to his active and laborious life, on the first of December 1797, in the 72nd year of his age."

The Goodrich biography fails to tell of one of the

more colorful events in the life of Oliver Wolcott. Seven days after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, on the night of July 11, 1776, members of the "Sons of Liberty", celebrating the great event of the previous week, toppled the gilded lead statue of King George III astride a horse at the foot of Broadway in New York. The statue was chopped into 20 pound pieces, loaded into wagons and carted to Connecticut where it was hidden behind the Litchfield home of Oliver Wolcott, melted down by ladies of the village and members of the Wolcott family and made into over 42,000 bullets. Oliver Wolcott's good friend and contemporary, General Washington, was quite displeased by this defiant act but everyone else was seemingly quite pleased that the British would have "melted majesty" fired at them.

Portraits of Oliver Wolcott hang in both the Connecticut Historical Society and the Connecticut State Library in Hartford. During his service as Lieutenant Governor and presiding officer of the Senate, he cast the decisive vote enabling a portion of Waterbury break away and form a separate town; thus the town of Wolcott, Connecticut bears his name in appreciation.

But of even greater lasting significance is the family itself. Oliver Wolcott Jr., a student at Yale College when the Revolution was brewing, followed in his father's path and found himself a young protege of our nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. When Hamilton resigned in 1795, Oliver Wolcott Jr. was Washington's immediate choice as the country's second Treasury Secretary, serving for five years. His political fortunes followed a circuitous course back to Connecticut where he served ten years as governor between 1817 and 1827.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the Wolcott name again appears as governor: Roger Wolcott of Massachusetts, great-grandson of Oliver Sr. through his son, Frederick. After serving as Lieutenant Governor 1893-1896 and Governor 1897-1899, Roger Wolcott died in the prime of life in 1900, so loved by the people of Massachusetts that a statue of him was erected by popular subscription in the Massachusetts State House in Boston. In a eulogy to Gov. Wolcott, U.S. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts said: "From the days of the Somersetshire gentleman to those of the present generation...the Wolcotts both as soldiers and civilians, have rendered service to their country, eminent as it has been unbroken."

During centuries in which women had virtually no political rights, we would hardly expect to find the names of women mentioned as prominently as those of the men. However, the Wolcott ladies were always faithfully present and unquestionably contributing in many way. Simon and Martha Wolcott had such a great granddaughter in Abigail Wolcott (1756-1818). It is said that Abigail was only sixteen and demurely spinning in the corner of the keeping room when a twenty-seven year old lawyer came to call on her older sister, Eunice. The lawyer, Oliver Ellsworth,

sighted Abigail and decided it was she whom he wanted as his wife and they were married soon thereafter. Scarcely a decade later, Oliver Ellsworth was a delegate to the Convention which framed the United States Constitution, then became one of Connecticut's first two United States Senators and later Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Of course, being a Wolcott, Abigail gave birth to a future Connecticut governor (William Wolcott Ellsworth, governor from 1838 through 1842).

Elmwood, the Windsor home of Oliver and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth is now operated as a museum by the D.A.R. Abigail's presence and influence in their home is much in evidence.

As Bishop William Lawrence of Massachusetts said at the time of the passing of his good friend, Governor Roger Wolcott, "The name of the Wolcott family has not been created by one or two great men, but throughout their whole history...in this country, each generation has sustained the good name and the high character of the past." We have attempted to describe just a few of them today. To do more would require an almost endless amount of time.

We are fortunate that the story of our Wolcott forbears has been extensively chronicled in three genealogies: "The Wolcott Memorial" (1881) by Rev. Samuel Wolcott (who also wrote the words to the hymn, "Christ For All The World We Sing"); "The Family of Henry Wolcott" (1912) by Dr. Chandler Wolcott; and "The Family of Henry Wolcott" (1950) by Miss A. Bohmer Rudd.

Since 1905 (with the single exception of 1918) descendants of Henry Wolcott have held an annual meeting in different locations in the United States. The Society of Descendants of Henry Wolcott always meets the first weekend in August and will meet for its seventy fourth reunion at Lancaster, Pennsylvania on August 4, 5 and 6, 1978. Chairman for the 1978 reunion is Miss Clarissa Wolcott (C.S.G. #365); and the Society welcomes all new members, whether or not they may be able to attend the reunion. For those who may wish additional information about the Society of Descendants of Henry Wolcott, they may either contact me or the Registrar, Robert Griffen, R.D. # 2, Perry, NY 14530. One of the Society's current projects is the publication of a new Wolcott genealogy, hopefully within the next couple of years, which will be known as the Griffen-Algre edition.

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1. Henry Wolcott (1) 1578-1655 married Elizabeth Saunders 1584-1655.  
Children: Grandchildren:

John b 1607-?

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Henry b 1643 d 1709  
mar 1664 Abiah Goffe

Henry b 1610 d 1680  
mar 1641 Sarah  
Newberry b 1614 d  
1684

John b 1645 d 1711 mar/1  
1677 Mary Chester mar/2  
1692 Mrs. Hannah Hawley  
Nicholas  
Sarah b 1649 d 1698 mar  
1674 Capt. John Price of  
Salem, Mass.  
Mary b 1651 d 1683 mar 1679  
James Russell of Charles-  
town, Mass.  
Hannah b 1653 d 1683 no  
issue  
Samuel b 1656 d 1695 mar  
1678 Judith Appleton  
Josiah b 1658 d 1729 mar/1  
1685 Penelope Corwin mar/  
2 1694 Mary Freke

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George b 1612 d 1662  
mar ca 1649 Elizabeth  
Treat b 1627 d after  
1662

Elizabeth b 1650 d ? mar  
1686 Gabriel Cornish of  
Wethersfield, Conn.  
George b 1652 d 1726 mar  
1691 Elizabeth Curtis  
John b 1656 d 1725 mar 1683  
Sarah Johnson  
Mercy b 1659 d ? no issue

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Christopher b ca 1614  
d 1662

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Anna b ca 1620 d 1700  
mar 1646 Matthew  
Griswold b ca 1618  
d 1698

Elizabeth Griswold b ca  
1652 d ? mar 1670 John  
Rogers  
Matthew Griswold b 1653 d  
1715 mar 1683 Phoebe Hyde  
John Griswold  
Sarah Griswold b 1655 d  
1690 mar 1677 Thomas  
Colton  
Anna Griswold b 1655 d ?  
mar 1674 Abraham Bronson

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Mary b ca 1622 d 1689  
mar 1646 Job Drake  
b=? d 1689

Abigail Drake b 1648 d 1696  
mar 1668 Israel Dewey  
Mary Drake b 1649 d 1681  
mar 1670 Ephraim Colton  
Job Drake b 1652 d 1711 mar  
Elizabeth Clark  
Elizabeth Drake b 1654 d  
1679 mar Nicholas  
Buckland  
Hepzibah Drake b 1659 d  
1685 mar 1681 Thomas  
Packer

Esther Drake b 1662 d 1702  
mar 1681 Thomas Griswold

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Elizabeth b 1662 d 1708 mar  
1680 Daniel Cooley of  
Springfield, Mass.  
Martha b 1664 d 1687 mar  
1686 Lt. Thomas Allyn Jr.  
Simon b 1666 d 1732 mar 1689  
Sarah Chester  
Joanna b 1668 d 1755 mar  
1690 John Colton of  
Springfield, Mass.  
Henry b 1670 d 1746 mar/1  
1696 Jane Allyn mar/2  
Rachel Talcott mar/3  
1727 Hannah Hawley  
Nicholas Wolcott  
Christopher b 1672 d 1693  
no issue  
William b 1676 d 1749 mar  
1706 Abiah Hawley  
Roger b 1679 d 1767 mar  
1702 Sarah Drake

Simon b 1625 d 1687  
mar/1 1657 Joanna  
Cook b 1638 d 1657  
mar/2 1661 Martha  
Pitkin b 1639 d 1719

DOES NOT CIRCULATE

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VITAL RECORDS

- NEW JERSEY: Records since June 1878 are kept at State Department of Health, Box 1540, Trenton, NJ 08625.
- NEW MEXICO: Birth and death records since 1880 are kept at the State Health and Social Services Dept., PERA Building (118), Santa Fe, NM 87501. Marriage records are with County Clerk where marriage was performed.
- NEW YORK: Birth and death records since 1880 and marriage records since Jan. 1880 to Dec. 1907 and since May 1915 are kept at State Dept. of Health, Empire State Plaza, Tower Building, Albany, NY 12237. For birth and death records prior to 1914 in Albany, Buffalo and Yonkers or before 1880 in any other city, see Registrar of Vital Statistics in the city where the event occurred. Marriage records from Jan. 1908 to April 1915 are with County Clerk in county where license was issued. For marriage records from Jan. 1880 to Dec. 1907 in Albany and Buffalo see City Clerk, and in Yonkers, see Registrar of Vital Statistics.

OCCGS REFERENCE ONLY

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Wolcott  
Family

## Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut

*by Edward A. Raymond*

Wolcott is a name less familiar than Adams, Lee or Roosevelt, but like the bearers of those famous names, Wolcotts have been notable in generation after generation. Oliver Wolcott Sr. was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, statesman, soldier, mediator, physician, farmer, trader, judge and governor of Connecticut. He was the son of one governor of the State and father of another. Indeed Oliver's sister Ursula was daughter, sister, wife, and mother of Connecticut governors and cousin of four more.

Henry, first Wolcott in America and early settler of Windsor, Connecticut, represented that town in the General Court (legislature) in Hartford from 1639 to his death in 1655. A lineal descendent, Frederick C. Wolcott, served as U.S. senator from Connecticut 1929-1935, continuing a tradition just under 200 years long. The family has also contributed a governor to Massachusetts and a particularly strong senator from Colorado.

Like his father Roger, Oliver was the youngest son of a youngest son, but since Roger had risen through his own efforts from apprentice weaver to royal governor of the Colony and was widely respected and well-to-do, Oliver had a happy boyhood in South Windsor and entered Yale at 17. It was a period of religious and social upheaval, and Thomas Clap was one of the most reactionary presidents in the history of Yale. Oliver seems to have behaved with prudence, as he led his class for all four years. Like Oliver, a classmate was to become another of the five physicians who signed the Declaration of Independence, Lyman Hall of Georgia.

During Oliver's second year in college, his father, already deputy governor of the State and chief justice of its supreme court, received a commission as major general and appointment as second-in-command of the colonial forces sent to capture Louisbourg, the French stronghold on Cape Breton Island. After Quebec, it was the second-strongest fort in French America, and its fall was hailed with enthusiasm on both sides

ORANGE COUNTY CALIFORNIA  
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

of the Atlantic. His father's prominence may have influenced Governor Clinton to offer Oliver a captaincy in the New York State militia. Upon graduation, the young man raised a company and marched to upper New York State, where he served until the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ended King George's War in 1748. The Treaty gave Louisbourg back to the French, in exchange for Madras in Hindustan, which they had captured from the British. This annoyed Oliver and most other Americans very much.

Oliver's much-older brother, Alexander, lived in Windsor. Also a Yale graduate, he was one of the most distinguished physicians in the Colony. The younger brother apprenticed himself to the older for two years, as was the custom of those days, to learn the practice of medicine, and then selected the town of Goshen in which to practice. It was expected that Goshen would become a county seat, but before Oliver had practiced as much as a year, nearby Litchfield became the center of the county that bears its name. Medicine was primitive and poorly paid at that time, and in 1751 Oliver moved to Litchfield to accept a post which his father obtained for him, that of high sheriff of the county. His medical studies and experience were not entirely wasted as he became, for the rest of his life, a strong and useful champion of inoculation for smallpox, which Edward Jenner had introduced in 1769. He built an attractive, spacious house on land his father owned on South Street, now one of the showplaces of the historic New England town. In 1755 he married a relative of the preacher-physician Daniel Collins, Litchfield's first minister. Collins was a controversial character, but Laura (or Lorraine) was a fine, intelligent and handsome woman, who was to bear her husband three sons and two daughters and return his sustained devotion throughout his life. Their eldest son, Oliver Jr., in addition to serving as governor of the State for ten years, followed Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury under Washington and Adams. His period as governor was marked by introduction of the Connecticut Constitution of 1818. Although the Wolcotts have, for the most part, been conservatives (Whigs, Federlists, Republicans), Oliver Jr. joined what is now the Democratic party.



*Oliver Wolcott Sr., 1754  
89 — South Street  
George III statue melted down in back yard for bullets*

Oliver Sr. served as high sheriff of Litchfield County for 20 years. During the last ten of these he served four terms in the House of Representatives in the state General Assembly. In the 1700's he became a judge of probate and concurrently a judge of the court of common pleas. At the same time he held the elected position of member of the governor's council. Meanwhile, he was advancing a military career through the rank of major in the 17th Regiment of Connecticut militia in 1771 to the colonelcy of the Regiment just three years later. At the same time he was an active farmer and businessman.

Vermont settlers from Connecticut resisted the conflicting claims of New Hampshire and New York to the territory. In 1777, under the leadership of Ethan and Ira Allen, they established an independent state, and modeled its laws and institutions on those of their native Connecticut. They turned to Oliver Wolcott and other Litchfield jurists for advice, and appear to have acted upon it.

Wolcott supported the American Revolution because of his strong belief in civil and religious liberties, but he was not a fanatical egalitarian, and indeed thought that popular morals and virtues were on the decline. In August of 1774 he drafted a forceful preamble and several articles for resolutions by the legislature, attacking the British Port Bill and supporting Boston in its opposition to taxation without representation. He also became chairman of the Litchfield County Committee of Safety and participated in the State's energetic program of military preparedness.

With the advent of war in 1775, Wolcott became one of Connecticut's nine commissioners of supply, a hard-working and able group headed by Governor Trumbull's son Joseph. In July of that year the Continental Congress appointed the Litchfielder a commissioner for Indian affairs for the Northern Department, with the important and difficult task of keeping the Iroquois from cooperating with the British. In this he succeeded, at least for the early part of the War. He also worked in upper New York State, Vermont and Pennsylvania to calm border disputes and unite quarreling settlers behind the American cause.

In October 1775 the General Assembly elected Oliver Wol-

cott and Samuel Huntington to the Continental Congress. These two, with Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth, would gain and hold the respect of the Congress for the Connecticut delegation throughout the War. Oliver Wolcott applied his intelligence and broad experience to the work of committees on the treasury, commerce and maritime and Indian affairs. Tall and impressive, he spoke directly and sincerely in debate, yet was able to compromise or change his opinion. He did not become a dominant figure in Philadelphia simply because he lacked the temperament and knacks of a politician.

In late June of 1776 Wolcott became too ill to continue his work in the Congress. The Connecticut legislature responded to Virginian Richard Henry Lee's proposal of June 7th in the Congress, calling for independence, union and a French alliance, by instructing its delegation to vote for permanent separation from England. It sent as Wolcott's replacement Governor Trumbull's son-in-law, William Williams of Lebanon, who signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4th. Under the rules of Congress, Wolcott was allowed to sign it also, when he returned to Philadelphia in October.

On his way home to recover his health, Oliver had passed through New York City. He found that a mob had pulled down the life-size leaden statue of George III which had stood on Bowling Green, and had broken it in pieces. Wolcott acquired these and took them with him to Litchfield. In the apple orchard adjoining his house he erected a large shed, and here his wife and other ladies molded the lead into musket balls for the American army. According to a contemporary account, Oliver chipped up the pieces of the statue with a wood-axe; his wife Laura made 4,250 bullets; their 11-year-old daughter Mariann made 10,790; and total output was 42,088 bullets.

By August 15, Wolcott's health had so improved that he could accept a Connecticut commission as brevet brigadier general and lead the State's 14 militia regiments to reinforce General Washington in New York. The Battle of Brooklyn Heights and evacuation of Long Island were disastrous. Many Connecticut militiamen deserted, and the rest were distributed to other units, Nevertheless the Connecticut Council of Safety affirmed their confidence in Oliver Wolcott by making him a



*"Oliver Wolcott, Jr. Library", 1799/1814/1965  
160 — South Street*

permanent brigadier in the command of the 6th Brigade of state militia. For the remainder of the War he spent his summers in the field and the remainder of the year in Congress, except for 1779, when he devoted himself to commissary duty.

In September 1777, on his own initiative, he responded to a call for reinforcements by General Gates, who was fighting a superior British force under General Burgoyne in upper New York state. With a small force of volunteers, Wolcott joined Gates just before the decisive Battle of Saratoga, which led to Burgoyne's surrender and a formal alliance with France. In May 1779 Wolcott was promoted to Major General and placed in command of Connecticut forces within the State. His was the unenviable mission of preventing enemy raids on the coast. He had an inadequate force of ill-trained men, while the British navy could land regular troops at any point at will to seize supplies and burn towns and cities. All who served with him considered Wolcott an energetic and intelligent leader, whose wartime service was an important contribution to his state and nation.

His service did not cease with the end of the war. The Continental Congress again made him an Indian commissioner in the Northern Department, and in 1785 he negotiated a treaty with the Iroquois which defined the borders of the Six Nations. In 1789 he also concluded a treaty with the Wyandottes, which ended their claims to Connecticut's Western Reserve.

In 1786, after 30 years of varied public service, Oliver Wolcott ran for lieutenant governor. He received a plurality, rather than a majority, but was elected by the legislature. He was a leader in the fight for ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Upon the death of Governor Samuel Huntington he succeeded to the governorship and subsequently was elected to that office in 1796. He lived to fill it for only two years.

Oliver Wolcott's long public service left his state and country the stronger for it. He was an early and unflinching patriot and staunch federalist. As a soldier he showed initiative, skill, resolution and bravery. Uncivilized Indians and rough frontiersmen respected his bearing, courteous manner and integrity. For his work in the field of law, Yale gave him an

LLD degree, *honoris causae*. The intellectual and scholarly ability which he displayed in college led to memberships in the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Argiculture. He was a man of strong religious beliefs and he carried them out in his admirable family life.

More affable and humorous than George Washington, he upheld identical lofty standards with the same total dedication. Oliver Wolcott, like his Commander-in-Chief, can make all of us proud to be his countrymen.



*General Oliver Wolcott*